The Ballarat Naturalist

Volume 25 No.01

February 2025

Exploring the Inspiring History of The Field Naturalists of Ballarat:

It was with much delight and anticipation that we welcomed Dr Susan Kruss, who provided yet another remarkable presentation on the inspiring history of the Field Naturalists of Ballarat (FNCB). Susan shared her insights as a newly-minted PhD recipient, having spent nine years researching the group's legacy and impact on local conservation efforts. Her thesis, spanning hundreds of pages, highlights the remarkable work of the Field Nats up to 2023, offering a deep dive into a history of advocacy and campaigning to protect our natural environment.

Susan's talk, titled *More Inspiring Stories from Our Illustrious Past*, took us through some of the most significant campaigns and moments in the club's history, showcasing it's unwavering dedication to preserving Ballarat's unique landscapes and wildlife.

A Solar Eclipse and an Unexpected Encounter

Solar eclipse, Mt Emu, 23 Oct 1976 Photo Margaret Rotheram

Susan began with a fascinating anecdote about the 1976 solar eclipse at Mount Emu, where members of the Field Nats found themselves unexpectedly meeting a team of scientists from Tokyo Science University. Whilst many flocked to Ballarat Airport to witness the eclipse, the Field Nats had chosen Mount Emu for an unobstructed view. To their surprise, they came across a group of Japanese scientists, who were equally taken aback by the gathering of local conservationists. At the conclusion of the eclipse, the scientists invited the Field Nats to sign their national flag, a gesture that symbolized the unexpected yet meaningful connections that an appreciation of nature can foster.

A Quiet but Uncompromising Voice for Nature

At the heart of Susan's talk was an exploration of the quiet but resolute voice that the Field Nats have provided for nature since 1952. The group's methods, rooted in detailed research, submissions, and cooperation, have remained steadfast even as more aggressive and oppositional approaches emerged in the 1970s. Through campaigns, public meetings and collaborations, the Field Nats have played a crucial role in protecting local wetlands, forests and wildlife.

Campaigns That Made a Difference

Susan took us through a selection of the group's impactful campaigns, beginning with the first public campaign in 1960 to protect Flax Mill Swamp. A vital breeding ground for native birds, the swamp was under threat from waste dumping and later proposals to fill it in for recreational use. On two separate occasions, The Ballarat and District Field and Game Club and the Field Nats combined their efforts to advocate for the swamp's value as a haven and breeding area to some 22 species of birds. Jack Wheeler and Robert Smith were instrumental to the effort, which included writing to government departments and speaking at public meetings. In the June 1968 Nature Notes, Jack Wheeler wrote an article about hunters and naturalists working together to conserve wetlands; uniting on a common front in the cause for conservation.

Another pivotal campaign in the 1960s was when the Field Nats advocated for the preservation of Enfield and Mount Beckworth forests. The tireless work of many included lobbying for the creation

of reserves, recording detailed flora and fauna data, and even helping to secure permanent conservation areas for these forests. The group's research not only contributed to scientific knowledge but also proved essential in convincing authorities to prioritise conservation over commercial development.

Iconic Discoveries and Conservation Triumphs

Throughout her presentation, Susan highlighted the many achievements of Field Nats members, including the discovery of the Enfield Grevillea in Enfield in 1962, which was eventually named *Grevillea bedggoodiana.* Susan shared many memorable moments about Stella Bedggood, including how she learnt to build a bird hide which led to her capturing stunning images of local fauna. Stella's efforts were instrumental in advocating for the protection of small animals including the Eastern Pygmy Possum, a species spotted by Ted Bedggood in Enfield. Ted's observation turned out to be the furthest inland that the species had ever been recorded.

The group's persistence also led to the creation of reserves in Mount Beckworth and Linton, working with landowners and local authorities to prevent subdivisions and to maintain habitats for wildlife. The club's efforts were further exemplified in the successful protection of the Linton Block, a rich wildflower and birding area that had been slated for development. But helping to save the Linton block was just the beginning, as working bees continued over the next 40 years. Dedicated and determined, the Field Nats brought all manner of heavy duty equipment to the working bees; weeds were dug out and burnt so they couldn't drop seeds, rabbit burrows were poisoned, and fences were put up to prevent stock from entering.

Clunes Swamps and Canadian Forest: Fighting to Preserve Our Heritage

A major campaign in the 1970s was the preservation of Clunes Swamps. In response to a proposed subdivision, The Field Nats asserted that the swap had intrinsic value as part of the natural heritage of Victoria as well as being a refuge and breeding habitat for bird life. When Bill Borthwick, Minister for Conservation and Lands, addressed the meeting of the Conservation Council of Victoria, he stated how the decision to acquire Clunes Swamps resulted from the well prepared and well presented submission from the Field Nats, and that other groups should learn from this.

In the 1970s the Field Nats rose to at least three major challenges to protect Canadian Forest from almost complete devastation: from the mass planting of pines, from a proposed industrial estate, and from the building of the technical college which was reduced from a twenty acre plan to an eight acre one.

The Ongoing Legacy of the Field Nats

Susan's presentation concluded with a reflection on the club's ongoing legacy. In more recent years, the Field Naturalists and the Friends of Canadian Corridor worked together to advocate for the creation of Woowookarung Regional Park, a protected space for locals to enjoy, monitor and help heal through supporting natural regeneration and planting. The Field Nats have also led public wildflower walks (below) since 2016, with the innovation of self-guided pop up walks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic becoming hugely successful.

As Susan shared, the Field Nats's methods, built on careful research, collaboration and advocacy, have remained effective and relevant to this day. The club's success in preserving Ballarat's natural heritage is a testament to the power of persistence, passion, and a deep respect for the environment.

Looking Ahead

We are very grateful to Dr Susan Kruss for her dedication to documenting the rich history of the Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat, and thank her for sharing her research and insights with us. As the club continues to inspire future generations of conservationists, Susan's research offers a valuable record of the quiet yet powerful impact that committed individuals can have on the world around them.

Sheree Cartledge

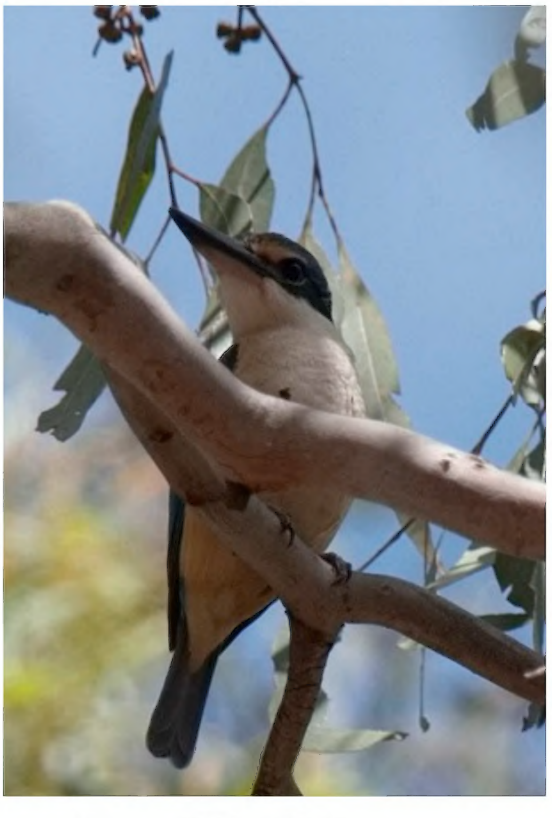
Images provided by Susan Kruss

Excursion Report: December 8th, 2024
Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary including FNCB end-of-year celebration

At 3pm on a delightful Sunday afternoon, a happy crowd of 21 gathered on the expansive verandah of the Clare Miller Environment Centre at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary ready to set off on foot for our last field trip of 2024. Wandering across from the parking area, one keen-eyed member had already spied some insects of interest that he pointed out to everyone as we headed out towards Graded Road. Numerous cream-and-black striped, orange-footed Willow-herb Day -moth caterpillars (*Phalaenoides tristifica*) were feeding on local Willow-herbs, *Epilobium billardierianum ssp. cinereum* growing around a historic cistern.

Heading down Graded Road alongside the Bird Paddock, numerous woodland bird species were heard and, in some cases, observed, including Rufous Whistler, Satin Flycatcher, White-throated Treecreeper, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler, Laughing Kookaburra, Grey Shrike-thrush and Grey Fantail.

Rufous Whistler



Sacred Kingfisher,
Todiramphus sanctus

A diverse range of insects was also found upon closer inspection of Eucalypt saplings, low-hanging mistletoe and various wattles. Photos of many of these insects have been uploaded by members to the FNCB iNaturalist project page: https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/projects/fncb-inaturalist/journal/102754

We paused just before crossing the Springdallah Creek ford to visualise the view as it was 50 years ago, before Mr Gordon Clarke had instigated large-scale habitat restoration works including creating what is now known as Gordon's Lagoon. Emily described that view as shown in a photo supplied by Mr Clarke's nephew Tim Cooke. The photo, depicting Mr Clarke and his rambling herd of sheep heading towards the ford from his Piggoreet West property (i.e. towards us) showed a very different landscape to the one upon which we now gazed. In the photo, there was no shrub layer whatsoever and vastly fewer trees, and of course there was no well-vegetated dam bank. What a difference he had made!

Continuing on along Graded Road, we headed under the Ballarat-Skipton Rail Trail to view the regeneration of the forest in part of the Sanctuary known as Linton Flora and Fauna Reserve North. It is managed by Parks Victoria and was subject to a planned burn 19 months earlier. There were plenty of Sticky Everlastings *Xerochrysum bracteatum* with a myriad of insects feeding on their flowers, but it was evident that the lack of rainfall was impacting the growth and flowering of many other species including the Small Grass-trees, *Xanthorrhoea minor ssp. lutea*. N.B. The area's rainfall was more than 200mm below average for the year to date.

Satin-green Forester Moths *Pollanisus viridipulverulenta* (right) were seen on Fringed Daphne-Heath *Brachyloma ciliatum* and a sparkling green beetle *Calomela parilis* on a young Black Wattle attracted appreciative closer inspection.—see page 8

Grey Everlasting *Ozothamnus obcordatus* was covered in yellow flowers on the western side of the road in what comprises the north-east corner of the Bird Paddock.

Wandering back to the start of the Gordon's Lagoon Trail, we stopped to peer out of the "new" bird hide across Gordon's Lagoon, spotting a White-faced Heron, Australian Ibis, Dusky Moorhen, Grey Fantail, (left) Australasian Grebe, Pacific Black Ducks, a Long-necked Turtle and an Eastern Billabong fly.

Disused nests of Eastern Yellow Robin, Red-browed Finch and Brown Goshawk showed a marked variety of nest-building materials and techniques, and hollows of vastly different shapes and sized used by Striated Pardalotes, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Owlet Nightjars, Satin Flycatchers and

Brown Goshawk
Nest remnant

Long-billed Corellas were pointed out.

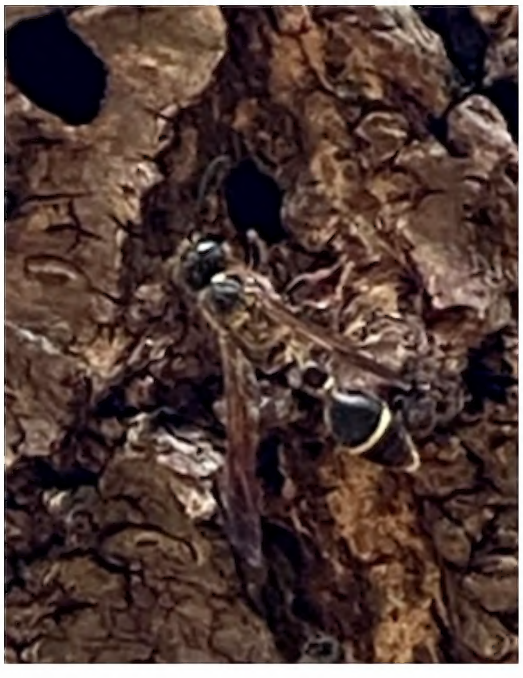
Stopping to read the memorial plaque on Gordon's Rock in his favourite glade, Roger Thomas - the Sanctuary's original warden from 1979-1983, explained that this was where he would often find Gordon on a Friday waiting for the train to go by along what is now the Ballarat-Skipton Rail Trail.

At this point, it was time to head back to the Environment Centre. We were joined by another member and friend for our BYO end-of-year dinner on the verandah, followed by the generous sharing around of many delicious Christmas treats by members. The late sun shone on Cottage Dam below us, providing the perfect setting for our evening gathering. Before dusk fell, members warmly exchanged Christmas and New Year wishes with one another and set off for home, already eagerly anticipating the first field trip in 2025.

By Emily Noble Images Angela A & Carol H

Recent Observations from Judith Bailey

I am very excited about finding what I think is a Potter and Mason Wasp *Australozethus tasmaniensis ssp. tasmaniensis* 5th January 2025—below and if it reaches research level on iNaturalist, it will be the third one found in Victoria and listed on iNaturalist, the other two are East of Melbourne.



Weevil

I have also found my first Nodding Thistle Receptacle Weevil *Rhinocyllus conicus* 24th December 2024 which were introduced. They love to chew on the introduced pesky thistles that love the volcanic soil.

A second Bogong Moth in October 2024

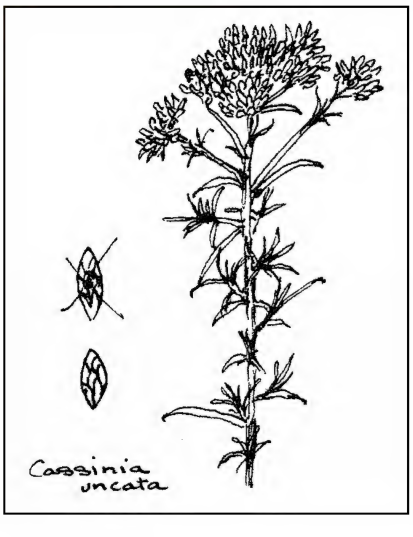
and a second Jumping Spider 29th December 2024 which is so tiny, among other things

VALE Ken Hammond

Ken came from Yorkshire as a 'ten pound pom' in 1965. He and his wife Marj joined the Field Nats in 1975 after Ken, a keen photographer, read Jack Wheeler's 'Nature Notes' in The Courier. Ken and Marj and their two sons came to meetings, working bees, campouts and excursions. Ken joined the FNCB committee in 1979, was President of FNCB in 1990 and 1991 and was presented with life membership in 2019. His main interest was birds and he was President of Ballarat BOCA in 1989 and Treasurer from 1999 to 2005.

Ken Hammond and Bill Murphy
April 2018
Image Peter Noble

Botanical Sketches from another past member Helen Burgess



Excerpts from the FNCB Club Meeting Minutes
7.30pm, December 6th, 2024
Held in person and via Zoom

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: Acting Chairperson Neville Oddie welcomed 21 members and one visitor attending in person along with eight members attending via Zoom.

Apologies: John Petheram, Wendy Bolger and Elva Bird.

.

Guest Speaker: "More inspiring stories from FNCB's illustrious past" were presented by Susan Kruss PhD.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

- In response to a suggestion from Judith Bailey, a draft letter was prepared by Sheree Cartledge on behalf of the Committee. It requests that the responsible road authority implement a reduction in the speed limit along Morgan Street from 80km/hr to 60km along-side the new wetlands to safeguard the birdlife and other fauna the wetland is intended to support. After a brief discussion, members supported the submission of the letter from the Club to the responsible road authority.

- Alasdair Wardle and Sue Grey-Smith were formally welcomed as members in November. Members took the opportunity to introduce themselves to them and made them feel welcome before/ after the meeting.

Reports:

Discovering Ballarat's Bushland Financial Report:

Kathy presented a separate financial report covering only the expenses and income related to the second edition of "Discovering Ballarat's Bushland", beginning by acknowledging the wonderful work by all of those who worked on the book, but especially Carol Hall, the sub-committee convener who took the lead in guiding this complex and time-consuming project to completion and ensured that the finished product looked great.

As a result, after just two months since publication, the Club is now only out of pocket 45 cents, with several hundred dollars owing from outlets selling the book. A spontaneous round of applause erupted! Carol stood up at this point to warmly ensure that all those involved received credit where due, particularly all those who went out to the reserves to re-write the entries, Peter, Claire and Roger for their hours of proof-reading and standardisation of the text, Kathy for her wonderful financial record-keeping and members doing an excellent job of selling the book, especially Peter, Claire and Kathy

again along with Shirley. Neville also thanked Carol and others involved for this monumental achievement of a small group of members.

Treasurer's Report

Opening bal. as at Oct. 4, 2024: $9,913.42
Income $4,216.00
Expenses: $6,053.75
Closing bal.: $8,075.67

SEANA Spring Camp in Marysville:
Full reports can be found in the December newsletter.

General Business

Sunday 8th December field trip, 3–7pm: "End-of-year break-up at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary" to be led by Emily Noble.

Planning for next year's Calendar of Activities: please let a Committee member know if you would like to present a talk to members or lead a field trip next year, or have any suggestions for speakers, field trip destinations or leaders.

Planning for next October's SEANA Camp to be hosted by our Club: Kathy provided a brief update. Pax Hill Scout Camp is currently being evaluated as the potential meeting point for registrations and carpooling/convoys throughout the weekend along with the Friday night dinner, welcome and guest speaker presentation. Ballarat Golf Club confirmed as venue for Saturday afternoon's SEANA General Meeting, group dinner and guest speaker presentation.

Our field trip on Sunday 9th February will be to the Western Treatment Plant. Four members have a permit to visit the WTP, so we have 12 spots available in addition to permit-holders. Please contact John Gregurke: jgregurke1@bigpond.com to lock-in a spot. First-in, best dressed!

It was sadly reported that Ken Hammond, a life member of the Club had passed away this week and John G. and Emily provided a few reflections on his involvement in the Club and warm friendship. Details of his funeral will be provided to members when available.

Val Hocking was sad to have read a line in Roger Thomas's "Nature Notes" column in *The Courier* today noting his impending

retirement from authoring his much-loved weekly column. Many other members also expressed sadness along with immense gratitude and appreciation to Roger who told us a little more about his decision to retire after 41 or so years! Emily offered to write a letter to The Courier to express the Club's appreciation of this weekly column and Roger's wonderful work, noting its significant impact, expansive reach and place in the hearts of many, along with an exhortation that they find a suitable candidate to continue the column for many years to come.

Show & Tell/ Field Reports

•Roger had found a nice lot of Common Fringe-lilies along Incoll's Rd, along with several interesting plants along Halls Road in Enfield State Park: Yellow Bladderwort *Utricularia australis,* Broom Spurge *Amperea xiphoclada*, Small Trigger-plant *Stylidium despectum* and a lovely bank of Coral Fern *Gleichenia microphylla* that can't be seen from the road.

•- Neville mentioned that he had realised for the first time during Susan's talk that the history of degrading land uses at Mt Emu was very similar to Mt Beckworth.

Next Meeting: "Forty years of BirdLife Ballarat" to be presented by Amanda Ashton, BirdLife Ballarat member.

When? Friday 7th February 2025, 7.30pm in person at the Federation University building at the corner of Gillies St & Gregory St, Wendouree or via Zoom if you prefer.

Meeting closed: 9.35pm. Followed by supper

- Discovering Ballarat's Bushland book sales

Thank you to all members who have purchased one or more copies of our latest publication, *Discovering Ballarat's Bushland*, 2nd edition. Thank you also to those members who are looking after a bulk supply and selling copies everywhere they go!

We have also secured the help of some local outlets to sell the book. They include:- Collins Books, Lydiard St & Bridge Mall, Tourist Info Centre Sturt Street, Eureka Centre Gift Shop, Buninyong Tourist Info centre
FNC Members $12 Retail $15

2025/26 Syllabus and SEANA Planning The committee met recently and gathered names of guest speakers to invite and ideas for Excursions for the next 12 months Once consolidated, we will send the list to members

We also hope many members will volunteer to write up notes on those speaker's presentations or the field trips for our Newsletter each month. If insecure about doing this, others will be glad to assist with editing

SEANA 17-19th Oct We have secured Pax Hill Scout camp for the weekend as a meeting venue including the Friday pm for registration, catered evening meal and guest speaker.

The FNCB AGM will be held on March 7th Please consider nominating to join our committee Also gather images representing *Jewels of the Australian Desert* to share.

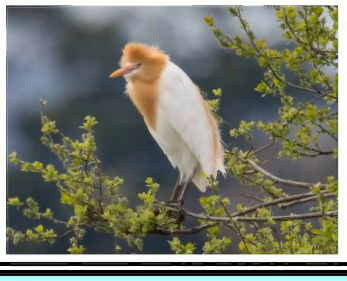
Our Next Club Meeting

"Forty years of BirdLife Ballarat" to be presented by Amanda Ashton, BirdLife Ballarat member.

Amanda Ashton is the Publicity Officer for BirdLife Ballarat.

A Volunteer is needed to write up a report for our Newsletter please

Photo of Cattle Egret from Ambika Bone



FNCB Excursion to Western Treatment Plant on Sunday 9th February 2024

Leaving from Fed Uni car park at 8.30pm; Return by 4.30pm.

Alternative meeting place Foodworks Car park Learmonth St Buninyong at 9.00am.

Toilet stop at BP service station on Geelong ring road

- Wear long sleeves, long pants and closed shoes, hat, clothes to suit weather. Sun screen and insect repellent. Bring food and drink for whole day outing. Binoculars, telescopes, field guides, note book.

***You will Need to let John Gregurke know if wishing to attend. Numbers will be limited by the number of people who have Bird Watching* Permits.**

Meetings and Excursions

Fri Feb 7th Amanda Ashton *40 years of BirdLife Ballarat*
Sun Feb 9th 8.30 am Birds of The Western Treatment Plant Werribee led by John Gregurke

Future events
Fri Mar 7th AGM & Member's Images: : *Natural jewels of the Australian desert*
Sun Mar 9th Lake Wendouree and Mullawalla wetlands

Volunteers needed to write up these events for our newsletter.

Next Committee meeting Tues Feb 25th at 7.30 pm by zoom

Club meetings are normally held on 1st Friday of the month at 7.30 pm at the Federation Uni Gillies St Campus (corner of Gillies and Gregory Sts, Lake Wendouree),

Committee

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Website: http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com
Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com
Meetings - in person and may continue to be held via Zoom.
Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

A monthly publication of the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc.
Incorporation # A0014919P ..... ABN 13 150 403 135